DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 419 612 PS 026 525

AUTHOR	Little, Priscilla M.D.
TITLE	Early Childhood Digest: Family Involvement in Early Childhood Programs--How to Choose the Right Program for Your Child.
INSTITUTION	National Inst. on Early Childhood Development and Education (ED/OERI), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	ECI-98-9015
PUB DATE	1998-05-00
NOTE	3p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Harvard Family Research Project, 38 Concord Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138; phone: 617-496-4304; world wide web: http://hugsel.harvard.edu/~hfrp.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Family Involvement; Family School Relationship; Parent Participation; Parent Teacher Cooperation; Preschool Children; *Preschool Education; *School Choice; Student Adjustment

ABSTRACT

Regardless of the location, the extent of a family's involvement in a child's early childhood program affects how well the child adjusts and how much he or she learns. When families take part in their children's educational programs; children do better in school, and the quality of their education can improve. This 2-page issue of "The Early Childhood Digest" discusses family involvement and choosing early childhood programs that encourage involvement. The digest defines family involvement as families working together with caregivers and teachers to create an atmosphere that strengthens learning both at the program and in the home. The digest discusses several ways family members can influence children's education, describes how to choose a program that promotes family involvement, and offers several questions that family members can ask of program directors to determine the family involvement level of their program. (EV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 419 612

National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education

Early Childhood Digest:

Family Involvement in Early Childhood Programs: How to Choose the Right Program for Your Child

May 1998

There are many kinds of early childhood programs for young children ages 0–5. Some programs are home-based, while others are in more formal settings such as centers and schools. They include Head Start and preschool programs, both public and private. Regardless of the location, the extent of your family's involvement in your children's early childhood program makes a big difference in how well children adjust and how much they learn. When families take part in their young children's education programs, children do better in school, and the quality of their education can improve.

What is family involvement and how can families choose early childhood programs that encourage it? This issue of *The Early Childhood Digest* looks at these questions, and provides information on how to choose an early childhood program that encourages family involvement.

What is Family Involvement?

Family involvement means that families work together with care givers and teachers to create an atmosphere that strengthens learning both at the program and in the home. It includes the many ways that family members can influence children's education. For example:

- *You can be a customer* because early childhood education is a service for families. Like other customers, you can tell programs what you like and don't like about the program, and offer ideas about how to make it better.

- *You can be a supporter* of the program by giving materials (snacks, classroom supplies) to the program. You can sell things (baked goods, t-shirts) to raise money, and ask for donations from local businesses who want to support the program. You can find new families by advertising in local newspapers, and places where families go during the day.

- *You can be a volunteer.* You can work at your child's program and help teachers in the classroom or at snack time or lunch. Sometimes helping at school lets you go to teacher training workshops on issues like health and safety. Sometimes it means taking part in classroom activities like reading to your children.

- *You can be an advocate for the program* by talking to school board members and local politicians about the benefits of the program and the need for continued funding. It is your job to let the community know the importance of the early childhood program.

- *You can be on the parent-teacher association (PTA) or on a parent advisory board* that helps plan the program, hire staff, and raise money. This job lets you have a direct say in how the program affects your family.

- *You can be a learner.* Research shows that parents' child-rearing practices and beliefs are related to the child's performance in school. A good early childhood program can help you learn about your own children's development and what you can do to best support their learning and social skills. They can offer you ideas about how to help your children learn at home. They can provide information about what aspects of the home, what parents do, and what their attitudes are that are most important to children's early school success.

- *You are the best resource for information about your child.* Each child is special and you can help the program adapt to your child's individual differences. If your child has a disability, this is particularly important.

How to Choose a Program that Promotes Family Involvement

If you are looking for an early childhood program that encourages family involvement you need to do two things. First, tell the program's director that you and your family want to be involved in your child's education while in the program. Second, ask what opportunities are available for family involvement in the program. Below are some questions that you can ask when looking for a program that encourages family involvement.

- *How does the program show that family involvement is a good idea?* All family members, including parents, brothers, sisters, and grandparents should feel welcome in the program. Are program activities open to my whole family? Do program staff seem willing to listen to my ideas? Do the written materials from the program talk about family involvement?

PS 026525

- *How does the program respond to each family's needs?* Every family faces its own set of challenges and programs should understand the individual strengths and needs of each family. Are meetings scheduled after work so that I can come? If meetings are at night, is child care provided? Do teachers speak any languages other than English? Will my child's teacher visit our home to get to know the family better? Are my family's holidays celebrated at my child's early childhood program?

- *How does the program let families know what happens during the day?* Communication between home and the program is an important part of family involvement. Program and home activities should complement each other. Families need to know what children are doing in their programs. They may wish to reinforce some of these activities at home. Teachers or care givers need to know what children are doing at home so that program activities can take advantage of these learning opportunities. Are there regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences? Do teachers have "call-in" hours? Is there time to speak with teachers when I drop off or pick up my child? Is there a daily log book that tells me what my child did during the day? Is there a newsletter that tells me what is going on at the program?

- *How does the program offer ideas about how families can help children learn at home?* Children are learning all the time, especially when they are home. But families often need guidance on how they can take advantage of these opportunities. Programs that value family involvement should provide ideas on how families support their children's learning at home. Is there a lending library where my children can get books to take home? Does the lending library have books on parenting? Does the program provide parenting tips on developing my child's language, art, and math skills?

- *How does the program encourage families to help at the center?* Family members have many skills that programs can use. Can I share family stories with my child's class? Can I schedule a time to read stories with the children? Can I help plan field trips? Can I go on field trips with the class? Can I schedule a field trip to visit my place of work? Can I volunteer to help at recess or lunch?

- *How does the program support the whole family?* Family involvement includes ways that programs support families, both at the center, and in the community. How does the program help me meet other families? Does the program offer coffee hours where I can meet other parents and make new friends? Is there a parent education center where I can get parenting tips and meet other families in the program? Some programs can even help parents find services in the community that they need.

- *How does the program value family members as advisors?* Family members have good ideas and programs need to hear them. Does the program have a parent advisory board? Can I help interview new staff members? Can I help decide what happens during my child's day? Can I tell program staff how I think the program could be better?

- *How does the program respect and use parent expertise about their child?* If your child has a disability, does the program ask you to provide training and information to the staff?

How much you choose to be involved with your children's program is up to you. The questions listed above can guide you as you look for a program for your child. Programs that value family involvement need to understand that your family is busy. Even if you can't commit to regular participation, you should feel welcome whenever you are able to help. Remember, no matter how small your involvement, your children benefit when the whole family is involved in their early childhood program.

This issue of *Early Childhood Digest* was prepared by Priscilla M.D. Little of the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) and based on HFRP materials, including ***Raising Our Futures, New Skills for New Schools, Early Childhood Reform in Seven Communities, and Family Centered Child Care***. For copies of these publications, please write to HFRP at 38 Concord Avenue, Cambridge, MA, 02138, call us at 617–496–4304, or visit our website, HTTP\\hugse1.harvard.edu/~hfrp.

This *Digest* was sponsored by the National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. It may be reproduced at no cost. For copies contact Carol Sue Fromboluti at (202) 219–1672.

ECI 98–9015